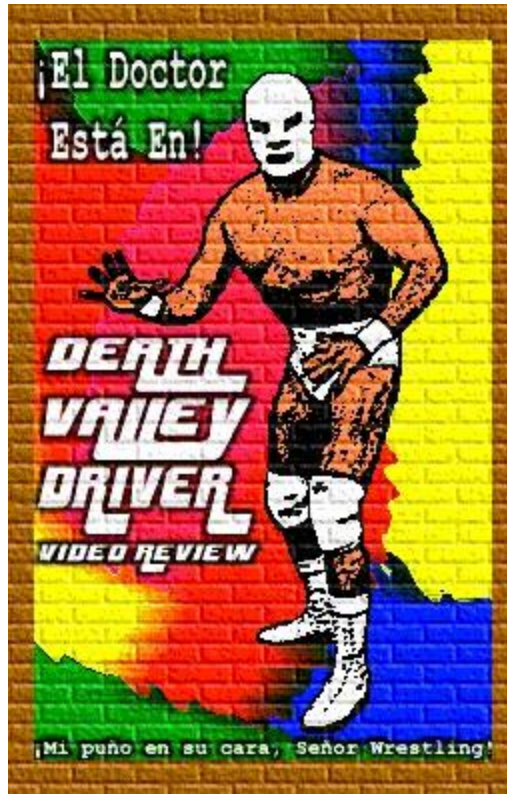




(Cover done by LINUS - kind soul and stout defender of the Queen... we think)

EL DANDY! is the World's Greatest Wrestler in 1989! CANADA! bring the glass licking! NAIMARK! refuses to give up on 2001! NAKANISHI! and MAEKAWA! go 60 minutes! Can SCHNEIDER! last 60 seconds? YOJI ANJOH! JAMES CHOI! "ROADS! Where we're going, WE! don't need any ROADS!".....

The Saga. The Drama. The Missing Keys. The Linux. But this is finally done. The one benefit of time is that everyone gets to contribute this issue - including TOM K stepping up to the motherfucking plate. Naimark looks back at the year that was 2001. The rest of us gaze into the murky future and comically predict who will be doing 45 second jobs to Scott Hall in two years. It will be great. On with the show, let's get the ugliness out of the way....

~!~ ONES TO WATCH 2002 ~!~

A note from Dean Rasmussen:

Since it's time for the Ones To Watch yet again and this year I would like to apologize for ruining the careers of Junji.com, Noahiro Yamada, Akinori Tsukoki and anybody else I have ever picked as One To Watch since I seem to be the kiss of death - a Sports Illustrated cover and Chunky soup commercial rolled into one. I will use my powers for good and say, "Keep an eye out for Lex Luger, Vince Russo and Kevin Nash. Those kids have the fire in their eyes right before a match that's unmatched anywhere. We expect big things. Buff Bagwell too!"

XAVIER (Marcel)

The parade of great wrestlers from the NY/NJ area continues. Great wrestler, great heel, and will take an absolute pounding. For example, he's been seen the past year having a cringe-inducingly great ladder match with Low-Ki and holding up his end of the bargain in a really fun three-way with Ki and Homicide. He's now in the Super 8 to be held in about 5 weeks' time and he's who I'd love to see take it this year. He should be making the indy tours all over like Ki is and I think he may well be doing so after the Super 8.

AUSTIN "THE TRUTH" ARIES (Tom K)

Its 2002 and I'm tired of US indy junior work that feels like I'm watching a WCW junior match circa 96. When the shitty Joey Styles wannabe indy announcer says "What will it take to put him away" or "They have a counter for every counter" which always ends in a bunch of highflying circa 96 spots, I start to spit up phlegm. Ultimo says all those 96 spots are passé. The future is mat spots. Austin Aries knows this too. And he's just super fast and smooth chaining stuff together on the mat. While the T2P guys move like they're morphing T-1000s, Austin's movements are like a Harryhausen villain. He's able to work meaningful smooth matspots in matches against cruisers working a circa 93 cruiser offense (think super kick). He works Minnesota and Upper Midwest (the added benefit of trying to watch Austin Aries matches is that they're in Minnesota and Bob and Doug McKenzie are on commentary). I hope when guys like American Dragon or Quackenbush hit that Upper Midwest circuit he gets a chance to work them. When working the counter for every counter for the most part he doesn't just go through the motions the way most do: hammerlock-reverse-hammerlock-reverse-irish whip-missed clothesline. Despite his speed, you mostly don't feel that he's going through the motions. Austin takes the time to sell the hammerlock and struggle out of it. Beyond the mat work he also has a nice standing moonsault; and while I'm not a dive guy at all, he hits a really great corckscrew dive: he executes it really nonchalantly and lands it in a way that makes it look like he's made a solid impact. Aries has a face that says "I'm a bitter scrawny lil punk" and when you watch his work you say "Damn that's one bitter lil punk". He's a young guy who hopefully will continue to develop. Fun guy with potential, who you should keep your eye on.

DIXIE (Schneider)

Dixie is a two year pro and a JAPW trainee, who has moved from one half of big bumping juniors tag team Youth Gone Wild, into a singles championship role. Unlike most Indy wrestlers his size he doesn't have a real highflying offense, tending to wrestle more like a southern heel than a highspot guy. He is really great at incorporating comedy selling into his matches, as his eyes will roll back into his head, he will shriek in pain and he has a great half concussed flop sell. Best fist drop in wrestling, and he takes enormous bumps. His character is kind of a badass pussy, he takes an asswhipping but thinks he is the toughest guy in the world, sort of Tully Blanchardish. I would recommend his December 2001 matches against Homicide and Elax as well as YGW tag work against DHS. He needs to start working more indies, as he appears to only wrestle in JAPW which limits him to twice a month. He is still in his teens and is getting better every month. My pick for the break out indy star of 2002

CHEERLEADER MELISSA (Rippa)

There are always those nice moments when something delivers something you weren't expecting. That was the way I felt when I rediscovered Melissa's work when we were doing the Joshi 100. She was in what was easily the US Women's MOTY last year and she has stood out in her work against both the ladies and the guys. Melissa has a much better grasp of actual wrestling as opposed to many in the WWF who skipped over learning over how to do a go-behind and an armdrag so they could get silicon pumped into their chest and how figure out how to butcher the Malenko/Guerrero roll-ups. I actually review a few matches later so I am not going to blather about everything here.

KID KRUEL (Rev Ray)

Kruel is one to watch because he's got some good submissions and is good on the mat, plus he can work in several other agility moves for a larger than average light heavyweight. He's had some good technical matches at the end of 2001 and Jan 2002. JAPW put him over Low Ki, so it appears that they'll be giving him a serious push which can lead to some good matches up against Ki and Homicide down the line.

KOHEI SATO (Tom K)

Ok so I'm watching Zero-One TV from July of 2001. On comes a Sean McCuley match. I've seen several Sean McCulley matches already and I don't think I need to watch another. But before I get to hit the fast-forward I notice Mcculey's opponent. Kohei Sato is a lanky guy with just natural babyface charisma. He has a great sleazy looking tattoo on his back and what looks to be an equally sleazy looking skin condition on his front. But he has a natural baby face aura. A couple months later he'd be in the Zero One Fire Festival Tourney where Sato gets to work against guys far far better than Mcculey. Sato takes a beating in every match in this tourney, and works underdog babyface well. He gets stretched and beaten on by everyone, and uses a shoot style offense and attempts at a crossarmbreaker as hope spots. As Jon Burr will tell you, Murakami is Buzz Sawyer with a shooter gimmick. Don Frye started out working scary out of control Southern heel shtick combined with the shooter gimmick. Sato isn't Sawyer, he's instead Morton. It's an interesting experiment to see if you can work that offense with underdog babyface storytelling. I can't think of anyone other than Anjoh who has really pulled it off. Working effective underdog babyface is difficult. Lots do it poorly. The selling, a realistic offense that doesn't require ignoring the damage done to you earlier in the match: there is a lot to being a good underdog babyface. I was disappointed with his work in the Robert Gibson role (on the apron) in the Complete Players show. He's a young guy; I think he'll learn. Hopefully Zero-One will send him to PWF or the FWA and he'll tag with Hamrick against the Main Attraction or something and learn how to do that better. Steve Corino described Kohei Sato as "a tall drink of water". He's tall and has a natural charisma. Zero-One seems to be willing to protect him and guys like Masato Tanaka enjoy throwing elbows into his face enough to book him on their cards. He may become the next Anjoh (a guy who is always fun to watch if not a great worker by any standard), or he may become more than that. Either way I look forward to watching him in 2002.

THE NEW ERA HORSEMEN (Marcel)

Now, I like to think I'm a good judge of the Professional Wrestling and that my first impression of workers is pretty sound. That said, I was pleasantly surprised by these guys, as they won me

over after I was dead-set on hating them before they even started the first match I saw them in. Paul Atlas and Jimmy Angel are great heels, having the Southern Tag Match formula down, great sellers, and can get the heel heat. They may well never headline MSG, but if you go check them at an indy show, odds are you'll be entertained by them and the heel heat they will get.

KINYA OYANAGI (Rippa)

Oyanagi is the guy from T2P that does the Saluting gimmick - at least I think Oyanagi is the one who does the saluting gimmick. Dean got me all confused when we did the 500. Now, I could have taken the easy way out and just blathered on about Milano Collection AT but I am more intrigued by Oyanagi because I want to know if he can keep the saluting up. I mean, there are only a finite number of ways you can incorporate the saluting into the wrestling match (my favorite being the "I am going to make my opponent salute while applying this hold".) Schneider thinks that he shot his wad (Oyanagi, not Phil) in the match against Taru. I think he still has a long way to go – though he needs to wrestle matches shorter than 13 minutes each time. Hit 5 or 6 salutes a match and you will be golden. And the question remains "What will he do when he runs out of salutes?"

GHOST SHADOW (Rev Ray)

Ghost Shadow sort of looks like Zeppo Maximo. He's another bigger light heavyweight, listed as 200 or 210, legit 20 to 30 pounds on the usual 180 pound North Eastern Indy light heavyweight worker. He has some ok high spots, but he also appears to have a deep love of the whacky lucha submission work. He's had two good matches in late 2001 with Low Ki and Kid Kruel, plus he's looked impressive with his lucha/lucharesu styled offense. He brings something different to the table in the NYC/NJ indies and should be fun to watch. I'd be interesting in seeing some work with him and Mike Quackenbush to see what they could dig up to put on each other.

BRAD HUNTER (Tom K)

You take a look at Hunter and he has this Buff Bagwell look complete with kissing his arms and you don't expect him to be good at all.

"Remember them days yall, we used to play y'all the radio and put our own lil part in the song yall"

One of the problems with the circa 96 style is that well it has turned US junior heel/face work into a lost art. The art that the 80s generation of great US Juniors (the Mortons, Eaton, Tommy Rogers, Dundee, Ware, etc) turned into something that transcended art is disappearing.

"This one's for North Carolina! C'mon and raise up"

Brad Hunter learned this art. He learned it from one of the greats: Eddie Golden. Eddie Golden is probably one of the most underrated southern workers out there. A great southern rudo who is able to reel in today's greenest young highspot faces. Brad Hunter is learning to do this as

well. Hunter has really crisp execution on his moves and strikes. Solid punches, clotheslines, and leg lariats. He has an old school finisher with a modern embellishment: springboard DDT. And he understands how to use these tools within the context of a face/heel storyline. This isn't just about working heel shtick this is about understanding how to create a face in peril situation and understanding how and why to give the face comebacks to get the better of heel. He seems to understand how to sell big to make faces offense look good and yet not make himself look weak. He seems to understand when he should let opponent get on offense and when he should be on offense. Kohei Sato as a face in peril doesn't have this understanding yet--- on some level he's doing face shtick right now without the understanding. I hope Sato eventually learns. I don't think Angle has got this understanding down, and I often think Helmsley hasn't figured it out well. You can go far the way today's business is, without ever having this understanding. But Hunter has it pretty much down. Hunter is effective enough as a heel that he can make his own trainer Eddie Golden look like a face. Golden just has natural heel charisma, and it's a real tribute to Eddie's ability as a teacher that Hunter was able to pull off the match as well as he did. The one criticism I have of Hunters heel work is that he tends to give the opponent clean rope breaks. He really shouldn't break cleanly. The point where I fully realized how much Hunter is in a class above most guys out there is when I watched one Brad Hunter match where he worked face. He works face in a match in a bar. He worked face completely differently than when he worked heel. It was the same moveset with maybe an added dive and crossbody maybe a dropkick. But it was paced completely differently. It was paced to get him over as a quick face with and his opponent over as heel with a bar crowd. Seeing that Hunter understood the formula well enough to work it from the other side and get it over with a bar crowd was really impressive to me.

"Cmon and raise up. Take your shirt off, spin it round your head like a helicopter".

\$\$\$%\$%\$%\$%\$% THE LUCHA LIBRE- 12/1989
(by DEAN RASMUSSEN)

Tom gave me this tape and I was quite happy to get it. Lucha Libre is the most graceful and beautiful of the wrestling styles yet it's history is shrouded in mystery before the influx of regular television coverage in 1991. Old El Santo films hint at the development of this, the most beautiful of the wrestling artform. A few tapes will surface here and there and the grandeur of the classic luchadores will appear in Japan on the Samurai Classics, but a full-on taste of the older era of lucha is pretty hard to find so we were happy when Tom got this from Alfredo.

Atlantis/ El Faraon/ Mascara Sagrada vs. MS1/ Masakre/ Brazo De Oro:

I can't figure out which one is Masakre and which one is MS1. I remember MS1 being in that WWO stuff from 95/96- as he feuded with Rey Misterio, Sr. Actually, it's all coming back to me now and the Larry Zbysko looking guy is MS 1. He throws a decent lariat during the Rudo beatdown that is the first caida. Mascara Sagrada gets worked over by Masakre- who is young and not overweight but has a Kenny Rogers-level Manly Rack. It's all low-grade Southern tag heat segments all through the first caida until El Faraon takes the tecnico offense to the

streets, making with the salsa-drenched soupbones and whapping chests through the crowd. Masakre sells his semi-tender ass-beating from Sagrada like a man. Atlantis keeps it low to the ground as he sets up his dropkick. MS 1 is Luger-like in his reliance on the clothesline as offense but before your humble reviewer can slag him, El Faraon catapults him over the toprope to the floor and he lands backfirst in the first fabulous hotDEATHbump of the match. Madcap Lucha submissions with the old school flying body presses flying over the top gets the caida for the technicos. Brazo de Oro rounds out the cast so far- which is weird because I always assumed that he was the worker of the Brazos. Second Caida, Brazo and MS 1 sucker punch El Faraon like the classic rudo will do and they start giving him and Atlantis the business. Mascara Sagrada bumps big for Masakre as the shit kicks in with Masakre trying to unmask Sagrada and the punching and kicking and wandering around that one would associate with a shitty caida that you don't want to see. Luckily Brazo de Oro shows up and rudos the fuck out of the second fall, hitting the Psicosis bumps in 1989 before kicking an aging Faraon square in the testicles for our amusement. The rest of the rudos get on Brazo's shit for kicking Faraon's aging, shrinking scrotum and Brazo could give a fuck- as he gives his two partners that fabulous, "What are y'all a coupla fuckin' pussies?" look. It was the coolest thing in the match. I wanted more out of Atlantis and Brazo de Oro. You wanted more out of Atlantis and Brazo de Oro. Whatcha gonna do?

Pirata Morgan/Hombre Bala/El Verdugo vs. El Fabuloso Blondy/El Brazo/Brazo De Plata:
El Fabuloso Blondy doesn't sing the National Anthem of the USA to get heel heat like in his match with Vader back in the day, but his ASTOUNDINGLY bad haircut does the trick of riling up the tasteful denizens of Arena Mexico when faced with 1989 Axel Rotten Bad Breed-level shitty safety hawk in all of it's speedfreak in a Camaro glory. Actually, he's wrestling TECHNICO! 1989 was a long time ago and I guess shitty hairstyles don't really show the content of a man's character and the Mexican audience is far more enlightened than I am. I am filled with shame. Pirata Morgan was the Man Who Will Motherfucking Die wrestler of the 1980s if all prior footage of him in the time period is any indication. He takes the first caida with relative rudo ease with his thick nebulous, indistinguishable partners- as they punch and kick their way to victory. They appear to win with an elbow to Blondy's small of the back. I was glazing over.

Super Porky does a lot of belly bucking in the second caida. Belly bucking was a fad in the 70s. Truckstops would sponsor Belly bucking contests. The rules were very similar to Sumo- as the two contestants tried to use weight and leverage to move each other out of a circle. The difference was that Belly Buckers couldn't use their hands at all. It was sheer utilization of pudge. Brazo de Plata may have spent his pre-teen years wrestling as Rubber Duckcito in the Hermanos Del Convoy- WHO COULD BE SURE?! Either way, Blondy is busted open for whatever reason as he works over Bala or Verdugo. Pirata gets rolled for the three and I anxiously await something interesting to happen in this match.

And then the third caida kicked in and all hell breaks loose a little. One of the non-Pirata rudos takes three giant bumps over the top. Porky goes all agile and crushes the non-bumping other guy with the Jump Of Fat off the apron. Blondy sells the DDT and the Figure-Four like they are a DDT and a Figure Four as he is eliminated by Pirata Morgan. And thus it is over. Yes, it is.

El Dandy vs. Emilio Charles Jr. - Middleweight Title:

El Hijo Del Santo/All Star vs. Fuerza Guerrera/Rocky Star: This is to determine which tag partners have to wrestle each other- mask vs mask!

ENORME! Rocky Star botches some stuff early. El Hijo del Santo is fun with all the submissions that involve him wrapping his legs around Fuerza's head as Fuerza has to figure out if it is more advantageous to stand or fall on the ground. The rudo parts are kinda plodding at first but it all kicks in soon. Santo is all about the Mr Wrestling 2 kneelifts- as patella hits Fuerza's head. Fuerza- enraged (possibly from being tired of selling three knee lifts- I mean crap- Ed Leslie did those...)- runs at Santo- who moves out of the way. Fuerza does the picture perfect Chris Hamrick bump but through the second and third ropes- feet first right onto his back. Santo hits the enormous tope and All Star and Rocky Star hit fat ass topes themselves. Fuerza comes into the ring and rips Santo's mask and then El Santo reciprocates. Fuerza was a fucking death machine as he flies face first into the ringpost twice. Fuerza later goes shoulder first into the ringpost to the floor to set up El Hijo del Santo to hit a GIANT plancha. Rocky Star one ups him with a GIANter fat boy Jerry Estrada bump. All Star hits a lesser plancha. Santo and All Star make it to the ring first and win by countout. Leading up to.....

Fuerza Guerrera vs. Rocky Star - Mascara contra Mascara!:

Fuerza is THE MOTHERFUCKING KING! Rocky Star throws him over the first four rows of fixed chairs and he takes the bump like he is Sabu in 1993- landing in the most horrendously grotesque way possible. It's all scrappy and hideous. Being Mexico, they show it in super slow motion. Fuerza sells it by being counted out. The second caida, Fuerza runs right into two Quebradoras and Rocky Star gets a two count. Fuerza tries to stand up but stumbles over and falls out of the ring. Fuerza goes on offense by reversing an Irish Whip. Fuerza does the off the apron Facebuster that Dick Murdoch and Fit Finlay would do, but Rocky Star can't keep his ankles under the bottom rope and Fuerza ends up slamming the top of Star's head against the concrete. They hit some two counts- as this Rocky Star is no great shake at this point so it's a bit listless. They hit a bunch of reversals until Fuerza hits a German for the pin. Fuerza is rudoing his ass off but he's barely getting a pulse from young Star. The Third Caida, Rocky gets posted and blood begins to blow out of his head. Star does hit a GIGANTIC plancha that smashes into Fuerza on the floor. They start in with the knife-edged chops. Fuerza bumps out of the ring to set up Rocky Star somersaulting into him off the apron. Rocky hits an odd Gory Special Variation but misses a big Senton. Fuerza hits a running Senton and gets the pin. And I am slightly underwhelmed. I dunno. I didn't feel any feeling of fight out of Rocky Star. It was kinda listless for a mascara contra mascara match. Fuerza seemed willing to go the extra mile but Rocky Star didn't seem up to the challenge of making this really great.

I'm assuming that Schneider will put El Dandy vs Emilio Charles on a comp. The rest of this perfectly fine lucha for the most part, but nothing vital past the historical value.

NAIMARK's SHOOT 2001 YEAR IN REVIEW

(by MIKE NAIMARK)

Hello again from your buddy in beatings and the rest of the crew at the Death Valley Driver Video Review! Owing to a unique aspect of quantum indeterminacy which I vaguely recall

hearing about in an advanced physics class many years ago, a strange phenomenon exists amongst the various Playboyz and myself; because we are part of a larger whole and due to the vast distance that separates my Colorado self from the rest of the East Coast Playaz~!, a temporal warp has been created which actually alters the fabric of space-time itself each time a deadline approaches. This manifestation of quantum indeterminacy is responsible for, among other things, the irregular amount of time elapsing between issues, as well as coming out with our 'Who To Watch in 2002' some two months into the year. Don't blame us; blame the Copenhagen Interpretation and Einstein's "spooky action at a distance". Now string your violin with some Schrödinger's catgut as Mike gets all weepy and sentimental looking back at 2001, and makes some of his notoriously unreliable predictions for the year ahead.

Awards are in order for those fighters who have excelled and deserve recognition. Awards are even in order for fighters who stunk up the joint once the bell rang. This year, I'm reviewing not only MMA as a whole, but will also break it down a bit to award the players for certain promotions. Just keep reading!

UFC

The biggest news for any average MMA fan in North America had to be the return of the granddaddy of American MMA, the Ultimate Fighting Championship, and its return to cable PPV after several years of politically-motivated exile. The first show back, UFC33, was something of a well-publicized disaster, with the main event of Tito Ortiz vs Vitor Belfort being cancelled at the last minute due to an injury to the Brazilian, and all fights on the card going the full distance to yield a long night of judges' decisions. But for the UFC as a whole, 2001 turned out to be a very productive year with more than its fair share of memorable matches and top talents.

UFC 2001 Fighter of the Year: Tito Ortiz.

Really, nobody else in the UFC even comes close (apologies to Randy Couture, who also had a fine year). Tito started off 2001 with a bang at the first UFC event of the year, UFC30, which saw him defeat challenger Evan Tanner with a brutal slam in only 30 seconds. At UFC32, Tito loomed large in defeating Aussie submission whiz Elvis Sinosoc in only 3 minutes with a withering ground-n-pound assault in a fight where Tito looked to be 20lbs heavier than the challenger. When Belfort was forced to withdraw from his scheduled match with Tito at UFC33, Tito gamely agreed to fight another challenger, who was eventually revealed as Russian freestyle wrestler Vladimir Matyushenko. Many observers predicted that this would be a fight where Tito would be dominated on the ground by the former European wrestling champ, and there were plenty of dour faces the next day as Tito totally manhandled the tough Matyushenko, taking him to the ground at will and pounding him with ease. Sadly, Tito's March 2002 match with Vitor Belfort was postponed indefinitely when Tito suffered a serious anterior cruciate ligament injury in training, and it is likely that Tito will not be fighting at all in 2002. But this will not detract from his accomplishments in 2001, when Tito was given the ball as a UFC poster-boy by the incoming promoters at Zuffa and performed so well that his light-heavyweight belt eclipsed the heavyweight title in prestige and marketability. With his oversized head and cartoonish gravedigging antics, Tito brought both skill and personality to the UFC, and was certainly their most valuable player in 2001.

UFC 2001 Fight of the Year: Matt Hughes vs Carlos Newton (UFC34).

On the heels of a disappointing UFC33, these two men produced more action in less than ten minutes than was present in the entire UFC33 lineup. Carlos Newton, fresh off his win over Hughes' coach Pat Miletich, has long been noted as one of the more colorful personalities in MMA, and he didn't disappoint that night, coming to the ring wearing a voluminous afro wig and getting jiggy to the refrains of 'Bootylicious' and showing off funktastic moves that would make Earnest Miller look like Fred Sanford. Hughes, an ultra-powerful freestyle wrestler, came to the Octagon without frills or fanfare, and promptly proceeded to have the greatest fight of his career. The story of the night was Newton's slickness versus Hughes' almost frightening strength, and the two traded reversals and jockeyed for position until, early in the second round, Hughes escaped from a choke by lifting Newton over his head and hurling him to the ground with a violent crash, perhaps the most brutal powerbomb seen on TV since the days when Vader was 'The Man'. Both men appeared to be unconscious in the aftermath, but Hughes was given the nod because he initiated the throw, and was awarded the UFC Welterweight title. A rematch is an absolute necessity, as this fight ranked among the most exciting in the history of the UFC.

PRIDE

PRIDE remained the biggest and most influential promotion in the MMA universe, boasting marketable stars atop every weight division as well as a host of lesser talents who were nonetheless beloved by the Japanese audiences. From top to bottom, PRIDE put more talent in the ring than any other promotion in the world in 2001, and the result was a number of outstanding fights and brilliant performances from great fighters.

PRIDE Fighter of the Year: Vanderlei Silva.

Vanderlei couldn't have had a better year if he was allowed to bring a machete into the PRIDE ring. At the first show of 2001 (PRIDE 13), Silva was matched up against the amazing Japanese superstar Kazushi Sakuraba, who was fresh off of his string of wins against the legendary Brazilian Gracie family, including a 90 minute battle with Royce that can only be described as historic. Sakuraba followed up by breaking Renzo Gracie's arm in another brilliant effort which highlighted his unorthodox but ultra-effective grappling skills on the ground against a veteran submissions expert. But despite all of Sakuraba's success, nothing could have prepared him to face a fighter so brutal that he's earned the monicker, 'The Axe Murderer'. Vanderlei Silva rose from the most violent bare-knuckle Brazilian competition to plow through the competition on three continents, and when he stepped into the ring against Sakuraba, he was at his brutal best. Taking full advantage of his 20+lb weight advantage, Silva completely manhandled the game but thoroughly overmatched Sakuraba in a horrific spectacle that ended with the proud Japanese hero in the hospital with a fractured skull, compliments of Silva's murderous strikes on the ground. After a warm-up match against a totally overwhelmed Shungo Oyama, Silva stepped back into the PRIDE ring against Sakuraba in the most anticipated rematch in the history of MMA. But while Sakuraba showed fire and an improved game, the end result was the same as Silva fought his way out of a triangle choke to slam Sakuraba to the mat and dislocate his shoulder, forcing a stoppage. As 2002 looms in his headlights, Silva is clearly established at the monster heel the fight world hadn't seen since Tank Abbott was beating up

opponents in the ring and in the stands, and that means money in the bank, keesters in the seats, and big smiles on the faces of Dream Stage execs.

PRIDE Fight of the Year: Antonio Nogueira vs Heath Herring (PRIDE 17)

In a year which saw the re-emergence of Brazilian fighters at the top of almost every major promotion in the world, perhaps none displayed the kind of all-around mastery of the fight game that Antonio 'Minatauro' Nogueira displayed since arriving in PRIDE midway through the year. A brilliant grappler and a legitimate heavyweight, Nogueira stunned the MMA world when he soundly thrashed PRIDE Grand Prix and 2-time former UFC champion Mark Coleman at UFC16. Displaying astounding technique on the ground against a world-class wrestler, Nogueira caused more jaws to drop when the fight was standing, as he easily outboxed the stronger Coleman until Coleman was begging to go to the ground, where Minatauro worked his Brazilian magic to earn the first tap-out of Coleman's career. Heath Herring arrived in PRIDE with no fanfare or expectations, and promptly turned MMA on its ear with a decisive win over the 290lb monstrous wrestler, Tom Erikson, and followed up with outstanding wins over Enson Inoue and Mark Kerr. Herring, a mediocre amateur wrestler, appeared to be at the forefront of the 'New Breed' of MMA fighter, adopting techniques and tactics from a wide variety of sources to compliment his physical, grueling style. When the two men clashed at PRIDE 17, the result was an amazing display of Nogueira's technical wizardry and rock-solid boxing against Herring's aggressive style and surplus of guts. In a replay of his match against Coleman, Nogueira easily handled Herring on his feet, fending off Herring's wide Muay-thai whip kicks with ease and countering frequently with straight rights of his own. On the ground, Herring showed an amazing resilience in escaping more than a dozen submission attempts by the wily Brazilian, several of which appeared to be locked-in finishers. It has been argued that this fight, for all its excitement and technical brilliance, was really a one-sided affair, with Nogueira winning both the standup and grappling exchanges between the two men, but Herring's refusal to be finished and ability to evade what seemed to be certain submission warrants mention and deserves our respect.

OTHER AWARDS FOR 2001:

Upset of the Year: Hayato Sakurai v Anderson Silva (Shooto 'To The Top 7)

Although Shooto doesn't receive the amount of press coverage of the larger Japanese promotions, no other promotion in MMA has had as many amazing matches and flashes of technical brilliance. At the top of any list of Shooto superstars stands Hayato 'Mach' Sakurai, a perfectly tuned fighting machine with no discernable flaws in his game and a dynamic, fan-pleasing style. Sakurai was undefeated in 15 fights heading into his match against the unheralded Anderson Silva, a fighter out of Brazil representing Vanderlei Silva's Team Chute Boxe. In a stunning reversal of fortune, Silva befuddled Sakurai with unorthodox striking and displayed good strength and technique on the ground, eventually earning a well-deserved unanimous decision from the judges. Silva has since returned to his homeland of Brazil, while Sakurai accepted an offer from the UFC to face their champion Matt Hughes in March, and sadly it appears that we may never see a rematch between these two outstanding fighters.

The Paul Varelans Memorial Award: Akira Shoji (PRIDE)

Winning fighters can expect to win all kinds of awards. Finally, an award for 'the other guys'. In memory of former international punching bag Paul 'Polar Bear' Varelans, this award will be given annually to the fighter who consistently withstands the greatest amount of punishment but continues to persevere without fear. Your proud winner of the very first 'Varelans' is PRIDE mainstay Akira Shoji. As an undersized heavyweight standing a mere 5'8, Shoji consistently and fearlessly steps in the ring against opponents ranging from the 250lb monster Mark Coleman to the 6'11 giant Semmy Schiltt without a second thought. 2001 saw Shoji absorb two hellacious beatings, first from middleweight contender Dan Henderson in a lopsided match, and the second a garish spectacle against the enormous Schiltt in a match which saw the much smaller Shoji absorb numerous crushing kneestrikes in his desperate attempts to close the distance and take Schiltt down. You couldn't help but feel sorry for the 5'9 195lb Shoji as he was thoroughly pummeled by a 6'11 260lb monster in a train-wreck of a match which would never be allowed in North America. Here's hoping PRIDE's new middleweight class is kinder to the gutty Shoji than their open weight system was.

And now, with 2001 in the bag, its time to look forward and view my predictions for fighters to watch in 2002:

Antonio Nogueira is my pick for the top heavyweight in the world. It is thus quite fortunate that he competes in PRIDE, which has the deepest and most talented roster of heavyweight in all of MMA. With Mark Coleman and Heath Herring hoping to earn rematches in a field which also includes Semmy Schiltt, Igor Vovchanchin, Kazuyuki Fujita, and even Enson Inoue, Nogueira is well-positioned to prove his talent to the world, or be the firsthand witness to the crowning of a new #1 heavyweight.

Jens Pulver was nobody's pick to even make it through 2001 with his UFC title intact. Consistently overlooked when the top lightweights were discussed, Pulver simply trained harder and remained focused as he fought off three of the most skilled challengers at 150lbs – Karo Uno, Dennis Hallman, and the UFC's newfound 'Phenom' BJ Penn. Although criticized rightly by some for his somewhat passive style, the fact remains that Pulver has the best hands in the weight division and is perfectly comfortable on the ground against the best grappler the division has to offer. When the year started, it seemed impossible that Pulver would be able to withstand the challenges in front of him. As 2002 starts, there is suddenly a dearth of challengers suitable to meet Pulver in the UFC.

Hayato 'Mach' Sakurai will be making his UFC debut next month against freestyle wrestling powerhouse and UFC champion Matt Hughes. When his game is on, Sakurai is one of the most exciting fighters in the world, a man with dynamite in both hands and fluid submissions on the ground. By meeting the mighty Miletich-trained Hughes in his North American debut, Sakurai is definitely leaping into the deep end of the MMA talent pool, but I'm wagering he'll not only be able to swim, but might be viewed as walking on water by the end of the year.

And so there you have it! 2001 is done and in the books, and I didn't see a single robot singing "Bicycle Built for Two" or have any hallucinogenic experiences beyond those I induced myself by

severe hyperventilation with a paper sack (the less said of that, the better). But despite Arthur C Clarke's lack of accuracy, it was still a heck of a year for MMA and the fans who stuck with the sport through the lean years in the late-90s. 2002 promises to be the best year yet as new fighters take advantage of the explosion of regional promotions in North America and Japan and Brazil continue to churn out explosive youngsters with their hearts set on emulating their respective idols. And we'll be with you every grueling step of the way to cheer them on and wipe the blood off your monitors, here at YOUR Death Valley Driver Video Review!

^%^^%^%^^% Indigenous Championship Wrestling – 8/19/01

(by PHIL RIPPA)

Canada provides the strange yet again. I got this tape from all around good egg Wade Yenny and the reason I got it was because it was chock full of Dr. Luther. I also got it because the canucks in the chat pimped it as being bizarre Dr. Luther including this weird kidnapping Britney Spears fantasy thingy. I was stoked. And I will be honest with you right now – I was sadly disappointed.

We open with a promo from Stands with the Thunder, Craps with the Lightning (okay, I might have just made that second part up.) He is wandering the "mean streets" of Manitoba (or so I am told) talking about how he isn't going to be your stereotypical Native American wrestler. We'll see about that.

Video package of Dr. Luther licking some glass. Umm.... Okay?

Your announcers are Don Allen and Don Callis, another one of those overrated Internet darlings. I wonder if that has anything to do with the fact that he was with ECW. (I really hope that my sarcasm was dripping enough here. I really don't want to have to attach a smiley. We don't have to hold your hands through all the reviews, do we?)

Rockjaw vs. Highlander

In a shocking development, Highlander is from Scotland. Can we get confirmation of this? I could have sworn that the announcers kept saying that his name was Lockjaw but the matchlist Wade sent me said Rockjaw. Well, Rockjaw isn't quite as stupid as Lockjaw but still. How hard is it to come up with wrestling names nowadays? Geez, just use your real name if necessary. Or just become "Chris (insert random last name here)". These two do some perfectly acceptable wrestling. There is a really ugly sequence when Highlander trips and nearly kills himself falling into the ropes. Everything else is watchable. Highlander throws a good clothesline. Rockjaw has way to much Road Warrior Hawk offense and not enough.... You know there isn't really a good way to finish that off. I mean what the heck did Animal or Droz or Sasuki for that matter do so I can finish that joke off. Anyhoo, Highlander plants a fine looking belly to back off the top on Rockjaw and a guillotine leg drop later and we are done with our first match.

It is at this time where Dr. Luther and he gaggle of freaks (dubbed the Army of Darkness) come out. There is a midget whipping a gimp. This has now taken a turn I really didn't want it to take. Anyway, the point of this segment is for Luther to yell at the crowd and then to beat up a plant (a

person in the crowd – not our photosynthetic friends). The plants' very attractive "girlfriend" watches this for a while and then jumps in the ring – all to get licked by Luther. I have no idea what this licking gimmick is all about. I guess it is better than the early Dixie nipple touching. Eventually, Stands with the Thunder chases everyone off.

Warrior vs. Chris Stevens

Warrior has an ENORMOUS ass and he wrestles bare foot – quite the odd combo. Chris Stevens has that hair that says "I write Babylon 5 fan fiction and I tip the strippers \$20 because I want them to like me." This was right there. Warrior provides most of the offense and he does a war dance, because one of the Indians in this fed had to do. Warrior wins with the Indian Death Lock. (Which was applied so poorly that we had to revert to the old Global standby of cutting to crowd shots.)

Trailer Park Todd vs. Chi Chi Cruz

I dozed off for most of this match. I awoke to see Todd removing his belt and I was like "When the FUCK did this become THAT type of wrestling show?" So not a good way to wake up.

There is a random video package for Princess Starlight who doesn't actually show up at the show so I haven't the faintest clue as to her actual role in the company.

It is at this point that mass chaos reigns. The hot girl is still at ringside, no selling the effects of her boyfriend's beating. Dr. Luther comes out and starts caning folks. There is one guy who actually looks good, I forget his name but I want to see him wrestle an actual match. We tease chokeslamming the midget (because they had this "Giant" come out of the crowd.) This is basically a long setup to Luther kidnapping the young lady. The girl also blows her spot as she falls as Luther is trying to pick her up. So they then redo the spot. NEVER REDO THE SPOT. And while she is getting kidnapped, Stands with the Thunder comes out and starts a match with one of Luther's cronies.

Stands with the Thunder vs. Lyngula

For a guy who stated in his opening promo that he wasn't going to be your wear your stereotypical headdress, Thunder sure isn't afraid to wear your Stereotypical Native American tassels on the wrestling boots. Lyngula is supposedly a homeless guy that Dr. Luther found in Bangkok. Sometimes, you can't make this stuff up. Lyngula is about three strands of hair away from having a full skullet. This isn't very good.

We finally get to the part that was pimped to me. Luther talks about the lady he captured and we cut to a shot of the girl standing sitting behind some glass. Suddenly, "Hit Me One More Time" starts playing. The girl – with pigtails – starts doing a very poor dancing imitation of Spears. While she dances, we get jump cuts of Luther licking glass. I am mightily bummed because this girl needed to be in the Catholic School Girl outfit.

Back to the ring. Luther – who is making excellent time tonight – comes out with the Army of Darkness. Renegade (the commissioner with spectacular hair) comes out and books Luther vs. Dances with the Thunder.

Dr. Luther vs. Stands with the Thunder

There really isn't anything to the match as it is just a setup to the Sports Entertainment. The nameless girl comes out and nutshots Thunder. Then another random nameless girl comes out and a catfight breaks out. So they wrestle for like another minute before the Army of Darkness comes back out and Luther starts blasting Thunder with kendo stick shots. This goes on for a while and then Dr. Luther licks some more glass.

We close with Thunder wandering the snowy streets again and a Luther video package made up entirely of footage from today's show. Oh, those wacky Canadian production values.

"Professional Wrestling, Artform in Decline"

by Anthony Gancarski

I can tell you why wrestling is dying. It has everything to do with the 1990s and the revolution in "workplace economics" that has affected the artform we all share an appreciation for, and I don't see things getting better for a long time.

It's not because some bullshit on Raw like BillyChuck V ShowKane draws a disappointing quarter hour rating, or because HHH's return, hyped as it was, really did jack for the overall quality of the product or for the ratings -- there's that fucking word again -- thereof. Rather, it's because the terminal underestimation of wrestling fans by Vince McMahon and his less-moneyed, yet equally markish, imitators has literally made wrestling too stupid to introduce to the casual fan unless he is seriously addled.

Consider what what what what what what what what is going on when you watch a wrestling match as compared to the matches of 20 years ago. Overhyped masses of roids and implants with waxed flesh exposing the business by hooking the near leg, or by constructing an offense full of fruity spin kicks and unconvincing strikes. No time to actually chain wrestle, not when THE GAME [tm] or THE ROCK [tm] has to be hyped in yet another of an interminable parade of "main-events" that lead nowhere except to the next garish angle.

And what do we get from the new aesthetic? A bunch of chickenshit sheetwriters who can't be bothered to put William Regal over as the God that he is, as if they had no knowledge of the importance of pushing the most credible wrestler working stateside today. A bunch of jackasses who hype the current WWF stuff as "really good, all of it", swallowing the come as they smell lalalalalalalalalalalalala what the rock is et cetera.

You have to hype it. The Rock, as they say in the chatrooms, has "cool factor". Oh, yeah, just bring it. He can't figure out his eyebrows, he whores himself out at political conventions for

fascist demagogues [or stalwart freedom lovers who just happen to want to put all those weed puffers in jail, even as their own families are collapsing from the weight of bullshit and scandal and treachery], he can't hit a damned punch or execute his OWEN HART IS MY FAVORITE WRESTLER [tm] sharpshooter [tm], but he sure is over and he sure does JUST BRING the catchphrases, ayup.

See, the Rock is over, even though Mike Jackson could take him to the ground in a shoot. The Rock is over, Big Show "has potential", Billychuck have "a marketable look". And everyone is watching matches to see how the crowd is receiving the wrestlers, with no apparent clue that in doing so, they lose the essence of the matches themselves and what they mean in terms of "discussing the bidness". If you watch wrestling without watching the work in the matches, you apparently are a smart fan. It also helps to chant Sell The Arm at an indie show, or to find a way to suck a promoter's cock in exchange for free tapes.

See, we are all mizarks, if you will, for presentation. Check out the puro but jack off to the pyro, because that is what has to be done, my god, you gotta be realistic about the bidness, if you will, because you are glued in front of that TV set 4-4-4-4-4-4-4-4-4-4-life.

And likewise, you piss in jars. You vote for free trade because the name sounds really hot and buy products stitched and shoved together by people in countries where production is cheaper and easier than the countries in which these products are consumed, even as you lock your doors in fear of your country's terminally dispossessed. You cry when the cable tells you to cry. You wave your flag, mute, dumbfounded, as if you had never been born, as if you had never expected life, much less to rock another body on wet sand under a 2AM full moon.

But that is a story for another time. The jig is up, I repeat, for professional wrestling. Game Over, as the shirts in every 2004 thrift store will say. Benjamins, Benjamins, Benjamins. But we're just happy to be here, and we are doing our patriotic duty by undulating to the hard rock tones of prefab theme songs in our prefab homes, so here are a few wrestlers to watch in the new year. These will all be WWF wrestlers, as the others would sell their mothers' asses for a three-minute shot at Funaki on Metal.

1) Lance Storm: If I can be serious for just a minute, you punch for shit. How the hell could you be in the business for a decade and punch like you're working shiatsu massage? Tap, tap, tap at that ball of yarn, and try not to purse your lips during your heel promos, Nancy Boy.

2) HHH: Dig the face with the iron cross on his denim jacket. Dig that no-selling Aryan Superman. If he actually had balls, he'd drop the leatherboy ring trunks, pick up a theme by Skrewdriver, and work a clawhold into his moveset. Though it doesn't matter, I reckon, as he will be roided out of the business in three years and forgotten in five.

3) Chick Palumbo: He will never be anything in the ring, but he is the odds-on favorite to start kicking a powdered wig as part of his shtick. Makes Goldust look like Dick the Bruiser, I'll tell you what.

4) Dean Malenko: Can only be watched if you have training videos for Rico Constantino or some shit like that. See, he can't HANG~! with the big boys. Far better to spin some bullshit about "less travel" and farm him out as if you had anyone in that company who can go like Dean.

5) Chris Benoit: Chirp. Chirp. Chirp. Unlike HHH, he will work his way back up the ranks until his nutrition habit reaps another dividend of rehab and painkillers.

Hope you enjoyed the picks! 2002 will be a year to remember!

~!~

SINGLES GOING STERDY~! (tm TomK)

American Dragon vs. James Choi - All Pro Wrestling (2/15/02)

(by PHIL RIPPA)

APW has started putting up these "Invite Only" Boot Camp matches on their website which gets me all happy because I am a big big mark for the wrestling on the internet. (And I just noticed that they have added a few more matches, I will get to those next time.) The basic story behind the shows - and thus the matches - is that they are the opportunity for the trainees to work a match in front of small audience. This is billed as being Choi's first match and you can see early that he is one of the first people that Dragon has helped trained. I can easily say that many of you would not like this match. Especially if you do not like two guys taking it to the mat. The match is a No-DQ match with no strikes to the face. They take it one step further as there are only two strikes the entire match - two Choi kicks to Dragon's skull that says to me "Hot Damn! Dragon is teaching his boys to work stiff." While the kicks looked impressive, I would have rather Choi left those out as it would have been neat to eliminate all strikes and "wrestling moves". That's not to say that the strikes didn't fit in with the story - they gave Choi his only real momentum because they stunned Dragon, who had been dominating - I just have this bias and want to see the weird things that you rarely get to see on American soil. (Man, I am all over the place with this review. Sorry about that. I really don't know what is going on in my head.) The rest of the match is almost a UFC style as they exchange armlocks, kneelocks, kneebars, etc... Man, if they had worked this with rounds and points, I would have lost my shit. But that wasn't the point of the match. The basic point being to work on Choi's application of holds, transitions and selling. I think of those three, the one that Choi needs the most work on is the selling part. He tended to not selling whatever body was being worked on as it seemed that he was more concerned with being in position for the next move. That is very understandable as if I was working my first match - I would much rather not blow a move than oversell a knee, especially if that meant cutting down on the usual smarty comments that come from the crowds that attend these matches. He also didn't sell - in my mind - enough, being in the actual hold. I always think

back to that one scene from Tough Enough 1 where Kurt Angle was teaching them about being in the armbar and about how important it was to really sell the hold. I liked that. Anyway, I want to make it clear that I did enjoy this match and that I really think Choi could have a bright future. Maybe he could be a One To Watch in 2003.... oh, maybe that wouldn't be a good thing.

Momoe Nakanishi vs. Kumiko Maekawa - All Japan Women (10/24/01)
(by PHIL SCHNEIDER)

This is the fourth match I have watched between the most hyped pairing in joshi wrestling. After crapping on there 30 minute draw, I was besieged by joshi nerds pimping this match as the end all be all of distaff pro graps. So, as we often do, TomK and I sat down at 1:30am and watched the whole magilla. As I like to start on the positive tip, this match was a lot better then the 30 minute draw, they basically wrestled the same match as their 30 minute draw but dragged it out over an hour, which allowed them time to sell and do some matwork. As per usual, Momoe Nakanishi takes an enormous beating, and Maekawa has the most varied kicker offense in the world; she has a dozen interesting and sickenly violent ways to punt you in your grill, and- as a stiffness mark- that warms my heart. However this was far from a great match. Nakanishi still has really limited offense for someone pushed so high; she basically hasn't extended her moveset past rookie level stuff, and doesn't really hit the stuff she has very well. She does 16 German suplexes in this match (which is still not as bad as hitting 13 in the 30 minute draw) and 9 Dragon suplexes (which look the same as her Germans). The suplexes weren't good German suplexes either - as she lands on her shoulders first and they just end up looking like roll ups. Basically, she has Ricky Morton's move set and sells like Kobashi, which you really need to flip around. The match starts with Momoe working on Maekawa's knee which is a really smart move, as one of the major problems with Momoe is her lack of credible offense, you can never buy her winning a match with anything but a flash pin. With the legbars and figure fours, I bought in to her weakening a bodypart for a submission. Maekawa did a good job of selling the figure four as a dangerous, painful hold from which she needed to escape - although as soon as she got out it, Maekawa completely ignored the fact that her leg was supposed to be hurt. Also, by the end of the match, they went into full sprint mode and ignored all that bodypart work they did for the first 20 minutes or so. I mentioned earlier how Maekawa would kick Momoe in the face really hard, and they were some of the most brutal shots I have ever seen in wrestling. However, because they were so frequent and Momoe would kick out of them again and again, they just lost all meaning. If the 14 thrust kick to the face gets a two count, why should I care about the 15th, at some point the moves mean as much as a Gustavo Mendoza single leg takedown. I understand the need to have a lot of near falls in a 60 minute match (although if you watch Baba v. Destroyer, for instance, they don't break out big spots until the very end of the match, and the crowd stays engaged) but they could have used rope breaks instead of kick outs. By the 45 minute mark, Maekawa looks really weak, because despite the beating she lays out she can't put Momoe away. Really the lay out of this match was very similar to a CZW match, lots of big dangerous spots and dramatic kick outs but no build, no sense that any of the moves are leading to anything, sure Momoe will take a big beating, but so will Sick Nick Mondo. What really interests me about this match however is the cult of Momoe Nakanishi. Why has she been singled out for such voluminous praise? Anyone who reads reviews and newsgroup posts by rabid Nakanishi fans can see the sexual undercurrent which is very obviously present

and I also initially found this very puzzling. When someone puts up a Takaoe Inoue site, it was obvious, Takaoe is really hot and he or she wants to fuck her, or barring that he or she wants to look at pictures of her taking bubble baths and jack it to them. However Momoe is not a beauty queen, she has frizzy hair and bad skin, so it isn't traditional beauty which would usually cause the restraining orderish behavior. The thing that separates her from other joshi workers is the huge beatings she takes. Momoe gimmick is that she takes these huge horrific ass-stompings but always shows fighting spirit. Her selling is interesting, as she doesn't sell like she is in pain, as much as she sells like she is being humiliated by the beating. Like when Maekawa kicks her, it is more degrading than painful, but she will soldier on and not give up. This dovetails well into the cultural bullying undercurrent which has been present in Joshi wrestling since Dump vs. Chigusa, which a reason she is so popular in Japan. Also in this way she makes the perfect repository for the sexual fantasies of a sadist. Who knows how many legion of Momoe fans spend some alone time with thoughts of Momoe - not imagining having sex with her, but imagining beating her ass. "She can take it" he thinks "Look at that fighting spirit, I can kick her in the head and she will come back for more"

Yoji Anjoh vs. Abdullah the Butcher - All Japan Pro Wrestling
(by TOM KARRO-GASSNER)

However legitimate the complaints about the WAR vs. AJ feud are, the one thing that people have to admit is that the crowds were hot and even the matches that looked like shit on paper were a lot more fun than most of the AJ vs. NJ stuff. Anjoh comes out in full on sneering heel mode. Anjoh struts mockingly giving the fans a thumbs up. BOO! HISS! The crowd hates him. Then out comes his opponent, Abdullah the Butcher. Abby comes out as the defender of all that is good and right about All Japan. Yeah that's right - Abdullah the Fucking Butcher is the defender of the All Japan tradition. Abby has the big Bob Backlund babyface smile walking to the ring as he is just feeding off of the claps of the fans. Abby gets in the ring and Anjoh rushes him before the ring announcer can even start announcing the participants. Fuck Muto's weak ass "old school love" shit. This is OLD SKOOL BABY! Taken right out of every Ken Patera vs. Backlund match. "BOO! Patera is so evil attacking Backlund before Bobby could take off his ring jacket. BOO! He's covered Bobby's head and is chocking him with the jacket!! BOO!" Anjoh grabs Abby's schmata and ties it around Abby's face. The bell hasn't even rung. THE HORROR! THE HORROR! Abby can't see with his face covered. HE'S BLINDED! HE'S HELPLESS! ALONE ON AN ISLAND OUT THERE! HE CAN'T DEFEND HIMSELF! Anjoh starts throwing punches and forearms too the head of the blinded Abdullah. The crowd is HOT! Anjoh goes so far as to choke Abby with his own turban. And the crowd is molten. With the turban no longer covering Abby's face the crowd remembers Abby's weakness - his head. It's an old All Japan technique to work on legit injury. And Abby's head is legit messed up. This makes all of those earlier punches and forearms seem even more nefarious. Anjoh sees the head and slams his elbow into it, forcing Abby into the corner. The crowd is loosing its shit. It's like Roberto Clemente Stadium or something. Anjoh stops working the head and looks for another big target. Abby's breasts are the obvious easy targets. Anjoh throws a stiff punch to Abby's left areola. He just TAGS the fuck out of that titty. Anjoh then starts unleashing stiff high kicks at Abby's unprotected breasts. The kicks hit with a sickening thud. Abby manages to get the strength to block a kick. And get in a throat thrust. The crowd is full on MEMPHO as they "UGH!" and

“OOH!” along to every strike that Abby throws. THIS MATCH RULES!!! Mutoh really should go to the WWF instead of All Japan. The Undertaker has been doing the Terry Funk sell lately. Since WWF seems to be all about redoing old played out heel stables right now, they should have Mutoh and Taker tag and get Gary Hart to manage. Get Mutoh in the WWF. I don't want this AJ vs. WAR feud to ever end. Ok back to the match. Recapping the story thus far: the match has already established a heel/ face structure and the strategies of the two workers (Anjoh weakening Abby's breasts and working on Abby's head, while Abby is concentrating on a throat based offense). Anjoh sells great for Abby's throat attack. Anjoh sells just like Budro. It rules. Abby bullies Anjoh into the corner and continues to work over neck. I'm kind of disappointed that Abby doesn't roll out the double fist to throat that he used to use in early 80s. The crowd is NUTS!! Anjoh is heelishly begging off - RUNNING LIKE A SCALDED DOG - and asking the ref to defend him. Abby throws a great punch to Anjoh's face to shut up that chickenshit heel. The crowd pops like its Fritz finally smacking the smirk out of that punk Hayes kid. Abby then goes back to choking the neck he's been working over. The ref goes to break up the choke. But no ref is going to stop an incensed Abby. This is like all those Bruno matches where Bruno has been pushed too far and loses control of his Italian temper. Abby head butts the ref. The ref takes the full Jerry Calhoun bump and is down. Abdullah the Butcher may be the defender of All Japan but he's been pushed too far. These WAR guys are an infection sent to weaken All Japan, the company that has stood behind him all these years. This punk just knocked one of his nipples off. So fuck the refs! Fuck it all! THIS HERE IS PERSONAL. Abby doesn't care that the ref is down. He doesn't care about anything anymore. He thinks he's weakened Anjoh's neck enough to be able to apply his finisher and end it. End the infection here. End it now. Abby drops the BIG bionic elbow right on the weakened neck of Anjoh. ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR!! But there's no ref to make the count. Tanaka seizes the opportunity and runs in and starts kicking Abby in Abby's already weakened head eventually busting Abby open. The crowd BOOS. “NO ! NO! SOMEONE STOP THIS!!!” I half expect Tony Zane and Mike Jackson to try to run in for the save, only to be thrown out. Abby struggles to his feet. What's that? TANAKA HAS THE KNUCKLE DUSTERS!!! NOOOOO!!! NOT THE KNUCKLE DUSTERS!! Abby blocks Tanaka's punch. Abby with a big right. The crowd “OOH!”s along with the punch and the dusters fly to the ring floor. The crowd breathes a collective sigh of relief. But no. Anjoh retrieves the dusters and NAILS Abby right on the top of his head. Abby falls like a tree. ABBY DOWN! ABBY DOWN! The ref crawls over to make the count. NOT LIKE THIS! NOT LIKE THIS! BY GAAAWWWWWWD! NOT LIKE THIS! ONE! -TWO! -And THREE! The heat is unbelievable. I've seen Meltzer rate WWF matches three and three quarter stars just for the heat, and none of those had this kind of heat. Fuck it, both the actual match lay out and the actual move execution was better than any of those three star Kane vs. Test matches. Oh shit! It's Kamala running out to clear the ring post match and set up the tag. I don't know how Cornette can simultaneously book both OVW and AJ without burning out. A MILLION BILLION STARS!!!!

Cheerleader Melissa vs. Robert Thompson - All Pro Wrestling (12/28/01)
(By PHIL RIPPA)

There are few of these APW shows that have Melissa wrestling various people. I enjoy them because they are treated - for the most part - as actual wrestling matches instead of "Heh, I get

to touch some boobies" fests. Thompson does do a couple of standard "I am male. I am superior" spots at the beginning but the rest of the match is wrestling. They focus a lot on basic moves like armdrags single legs to balance the match out because Thompson clearly has a power advantage so doing spots that are unrealistic (like say Melissa press slamming Thompson) are not to be found. Almost as if you were watching say a Spike Dudley/Kevin Nash match - if you imagine that Spike had an enormous rack and Nash was black and could actually wrestle. As per usual, Melissa plays spunky underdog who takes a big beating but won't be beaten. Thompson - who isn't afraid to not bring the effort - looks good as he drops some nifty looking elbows and knee drops while doing the proper amount of selling. That is he sells the "high impact" offense - the flying clothesline, the top rope rana - as being shocked and he sells the front chancery and chicken wing in more of a "How do I get out of this" way, instead of "My leg is being snapped" kinda way. My biggest problem with Melissa's offense right now is that she bases a lot of it off of kicks and I can't tell if they are credible or not - mainly due to the fact that I am watching these all off the net. As the match goes by (and it goes about 13 minutes) it turns more into a squash then anything else. Thompson wins with a TKO and then does the creepy "I have to place my dick right on her Hootananny" pin. Fine professional wrestling entertainment.

Chris Hero vs. Ian Rotten vs. Cash Flo - IWA-Mid South (11/24/01)

(by Phil Schneider)

I have always been kind of intrigued by Ian Rotten. For a guy who has made his name in glass, thumbtack, rubbing alcohol, cactus matches (really the first guy to do that stuff in the U.S.) he would always show a little bit of actually wrestling ability in between the carving, and I knew that he had a legit amateur background. So when Chris Hero pimped his singles match against Ian and this 3-Way, I got really excited to see some Ian Rotten wrestling matches (I am still waiting for the singles match.. If anyone wants to send that to me.. Chris I am talking to you here.) It was clear that they were going for a Regal vs. Finlay or Regal vs. Benoit style match here as everything they did was super stiff. They opened with a triple knuckle lock (A spot I usually hate) and then started exchanging shoot headbutts busting Ian open (which doesn't mean that much, I am sure Ian bleeds when he washes his face), a really nasty looking stuff and the kind of thing that puts a smile on my face. All three guys used different strikes with Cash Flo using nasty chops, Hero using Misawa style elbow smashes, and Ian using chops and really great uppercuts. Ian broke out some nice matwork, including a nasty cravate (which turned into a 3 way cravate which is the greatest variation of a 3-way sleeper I have seen, and I hate the 3-way sleeper spot) and even broke out a Cattle Mutilation (although he couldn't hold the bridge, still looked hurty though). He was clearly the base of the match, as he was the most experienced guy, and this was paced very well for a 3-way, avoiding a lot of the problems those matches usually have. This never broke down into a spot fest, and the near falls all were put together believably. I really dug his work here, and I need to get a lot more of Ian in straight wrestling matches. Cash Flo was a guy who hasn't impressed me before but looked good here, he had nasty chops, a great looking top rope legdrop and really fun goofy selling. Hero looked really solid here too, out of the young guys in IWAMS (Cabana, Hero, Punk, Steele) he is my favorite as the others tend to devolve into spot-spot-spot-spot, while he seems to be more well rounded, he also seemed very willing to take and deliver a big ass whipping which will always warm you

to my heart. One big flaw however is that his hair tends to get into his eyes, and he sort of unconsciously flips it back, in a way which hurts his selling, especially egregious was him breaking out of a abdominal stretch to mess with his hair, and then placing himself back in the stretch. He should either invest in a rubber band or lose a hair match. The finish of this match was done really well, as all of the guys were able to get near falls off finishers, which were just broken up. Ian put Hero in the Tarantuala (which looked kind of silly) and then Cash Flo hit a neck snap bumping both guys which looked awesome and set up the finish really well. I didn't get a sense of overkill here, as the big spots were saved for the end, and really meant something, much better paced then Momoe vs. Maekawa. In the pantheon of 3-Ways this ranks pretty high, I would put it above any WWF 3-Way I have seen, although It isn't as good as Homicide vs. Xavier vs. Low-Ki. Well worth getting your hands on.

Cheerleader Melissa vs. Jardi Frantz - All Pro Wrestling (1/11/02)

(by RIPPA)

My understanding are all these shows are like the APW "Dark" Shows or something or other. As opposed to Thompson, Melissa may be just about the same size as Jardi. Match starts off slowly as Jardi spends a good 90 seconds doing the Zybylko stall - and this is only a 10 minute match. Melissa busts out the armdrag again and I continue to love the fact that there are some women who actually get trained so they can actually wrestle (others right off the top of my head would be folks like Buff E Republic and Mercedes Martinez). Frantz does the usual "I am wrestling a women so I must do the Bronco Buster" spot. Melissa's offense comes off of counters and reverses (like the swany swinging DDT that is one of her staples) which I personally feel is the proper way to work a match with someone of her experience. (Kinda like a Maven match sans the bad strikes and the dropkick.) Frantz really doesn't do much and I can't tell if it is because he has dumbed down the match so much or if he is really mailing it in (kneejerk reaction is to say the latter but I can easily be wrong). Jardi is playing the heel so he picks Melissa up on several two counts. So we all now what happens next. Frantz goes for a suplex and Melissa counters into a small package for the win. The Thompson match was better as an actual match but I like the way both matches were booked - as I could easily believe Melissa getting a flash pin on Frantz while I don't think any victory over Thompson - without over booking it 27 ways - would be realistic. No problems with this at all.

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